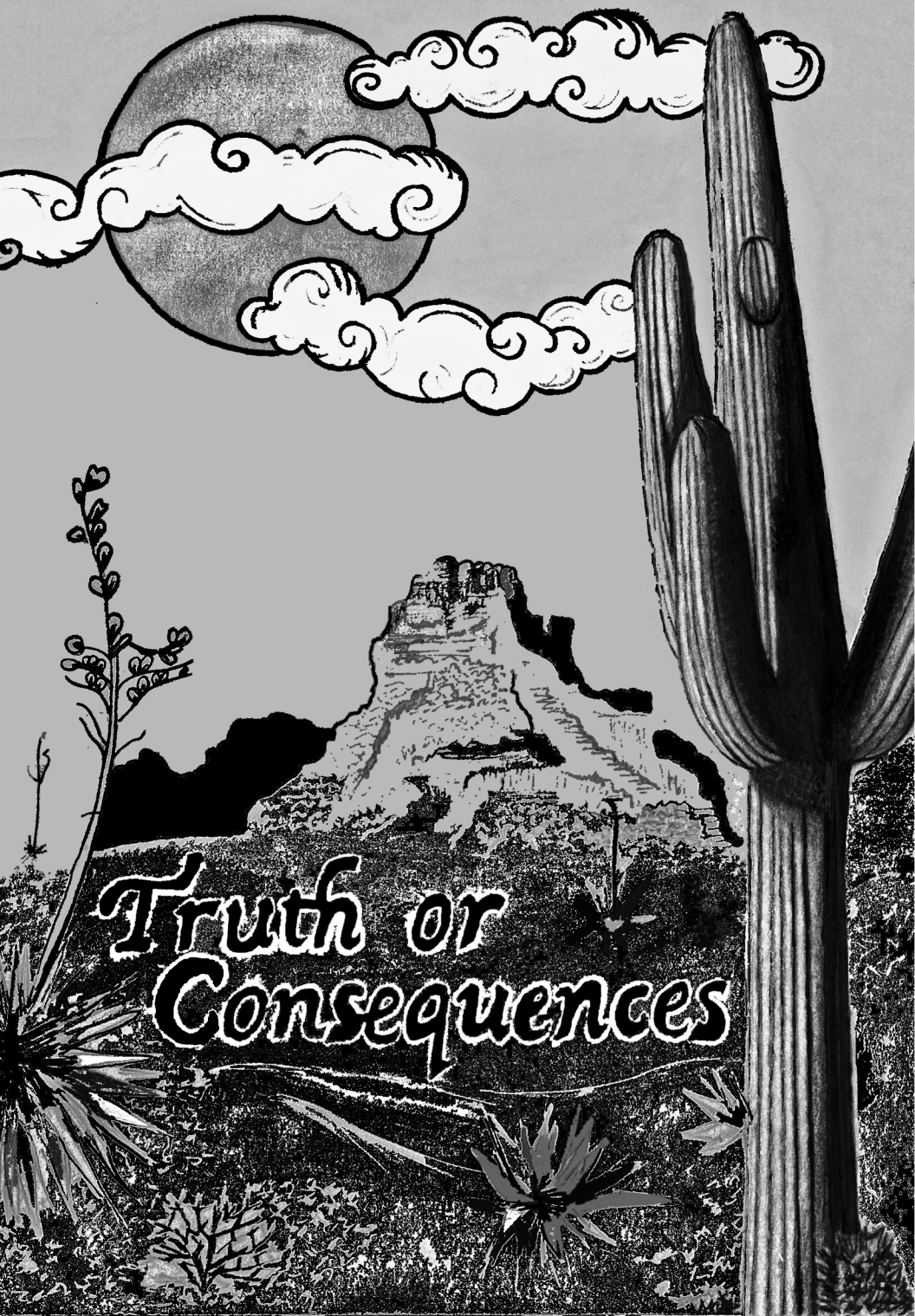




Truth or Consequences

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

Rachel Lee

T R U T H
OR
CONSEQUENCES

Monster House Press

Cleveland & Columbus & Bloomington

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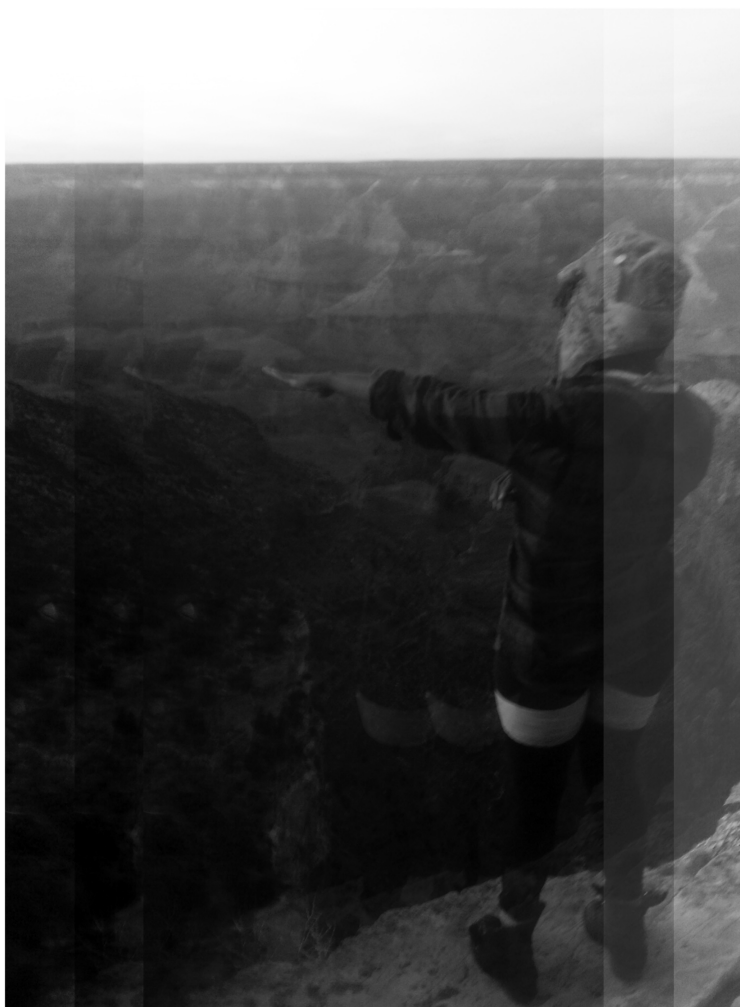
This is a zine about **healing**. The sort not understood through **words**, but in the whispering of **songs** remembered in **dreams**. Within these pages I split open my **body**, revealing ancestral cartographies of struggle, pain, resistance.

Spells for healing.

Prayers of transformation.

Rebirth my Spirit.

MY JOURNEY OF HEALING began in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. Here, I met Yarrow—herbalist, healer, and mother who taught me how to use food and plants as medicine.



In this place, I learned to breathe in the way only the desert can teach you. It filled my lungs and seeped into my soul, and I've never looked back.

THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMONING;

FOR HEALING, POWER, AND
MAGIC; FOR BLACK POWER TO
RESIST THIS WORLD THAT SEEKS
TO EVISCERATE OUR SPIRITS.

I FIRST HEARD IT WHEN I TRAV-
ELED TO WASHINGTON, D.C.
FOR THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY
OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S
MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR
JOBS AND FREEDOM.

* * *

Healing.

I want it.

I need it.

I've got to have it.



Power.

I want it.

I need it.

I've got to have it.



Magic.

I want it.

I need it.

I've got to have it.



MOON BECKONING DEAD EARTH

The dragging
of my Self
against walls
of umber and blood
serrates my womb
against a nestling pain.

Sweet and low down,
reaching into
the recesses
of my cavernous
well.

In shadows,
flames
dance
to chamberous symphonies;
embers and smoke.

We complete circles
of time
losing sense of endings
or beginnings;
knowing only
our cycles
of being.

Humor pours out
circulating drumbeats,
sounding our feet
to rhythms
known by
ancestors.

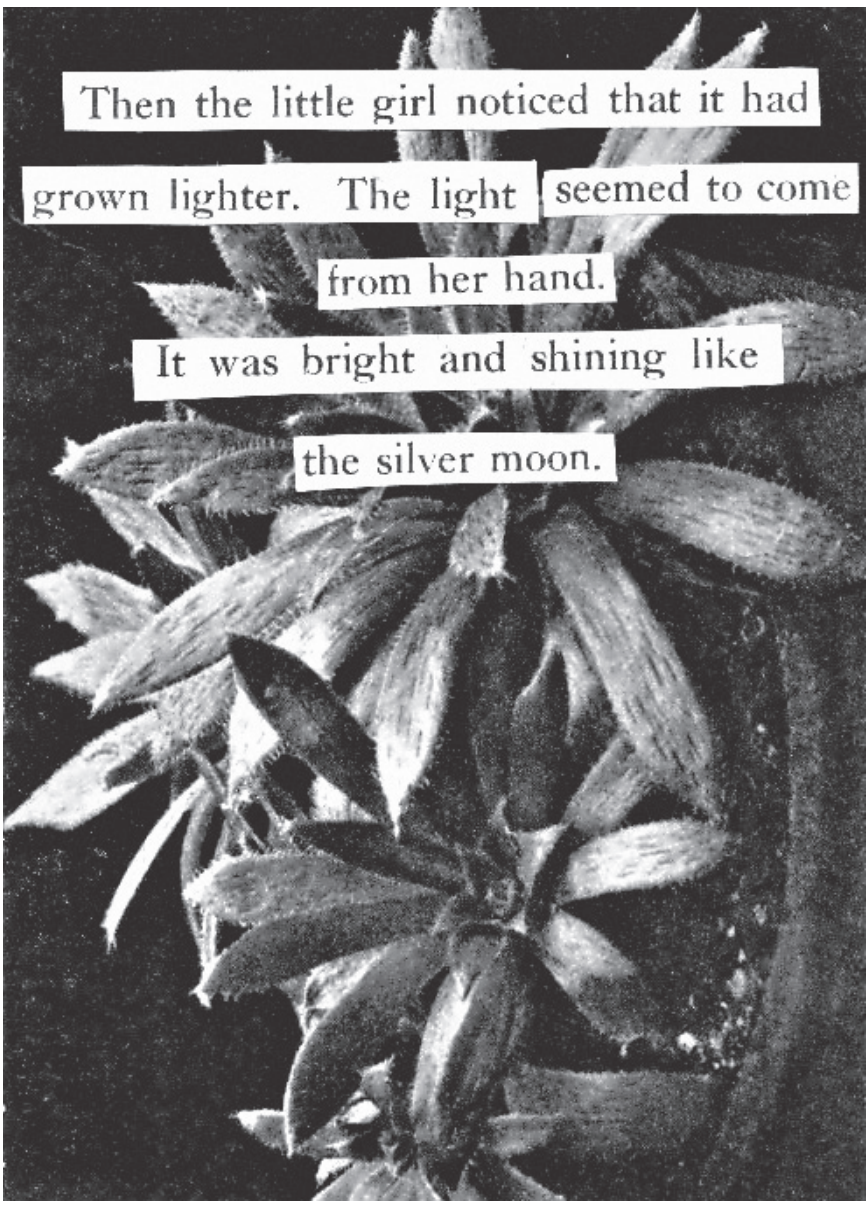
The smell
of smoldering herbs
harkens the testimony
of wise ways.

Secrets held
in the hands of
ancient protectors.

Sage femme.
Healer.
Witch,
a cauldron
at your feet.

In the raven night sky
the Moon
beckons me
home.

In death
I am rebirthed.
May my Spirit
ascend.

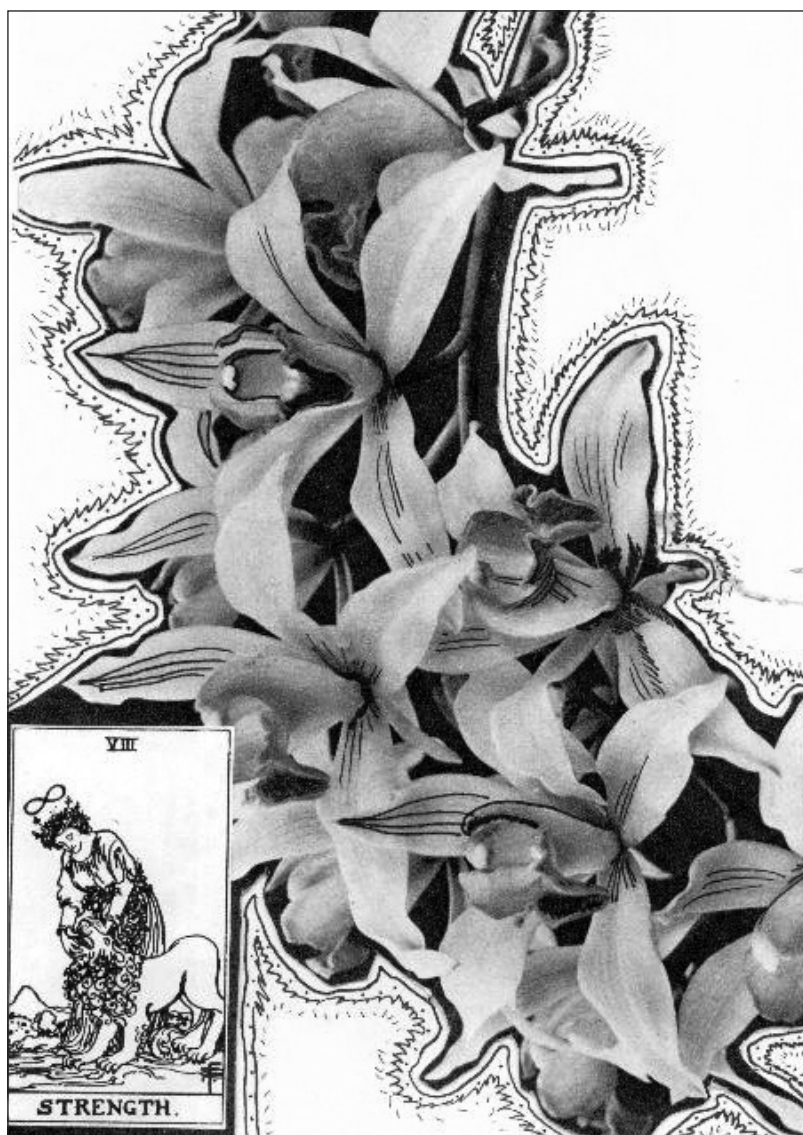


Then the little girl noticed that it had
grown lighter. The light seemed to come
from her hand.
It was bright and shining like
the silver moon.

***In your ideal world,
what would access
to healing modalities
look like?***

*Everyone would have
access to what
they needed.*

*There would be nothing
to get in the way.*



INTERVIEW WITH CATY CRABB, CLINICAL HERBALIST

Can you talk a little about the bio region where you reside? What are some medicinal plants one is likely to find around here? What are some examples that are also found in more urban environments?

I live in the central Appalachian bioregion, the part of the Appalachian Plateaus. The glaciers did not make it here, thus giving our forests deep well-drained soils. It has limestone bedrock that creates good amounts of calcium and magnesium to support many types of plants. So, there are a lot of medicinal plants that grow here. You can find Goldenseal, American ginseng, blue cohosh, trillium, black cohosh, black haw, white oak, lobelia, skullcap, butterfly weed, wild ginger, wild yam, on and on and on...there are over 500 medicinal plants in this area.

Some examples of plants that you can find here as well as in more urban areas are plantain, yarrow, dandelion, self-heal, burdock, ragweed (yes—it is medicinal! Tincture of the fresh plant is the best thing you can take for hayfever symptoms), Canadian fleabane, cleavers, chickweed, mimosa tree. And then in gardens you can find or grow many medicinal herbs easily like comfrey, or Echinacea, or calendula. Many urban areas have larger parks where you can find medicinal herbs that you may not see in other areas of the city. Anywhere you harvest herbs for medicinal use it is important to know if that plant concentrates heavy metals for example, like horsetail or ginkgo, and only pick those from very clean areas. This is obviously an issue in larger cities, but in rural areas as well. You have to know the history of the land, and what is going on currently. Is there chemical agriculture upstream? Was there strip mining in the area 50 years ago?

How does your approach to healing differ from mainstream allopathic medicine? Are the two mutually exclusive, or can folks use a little from both fields?

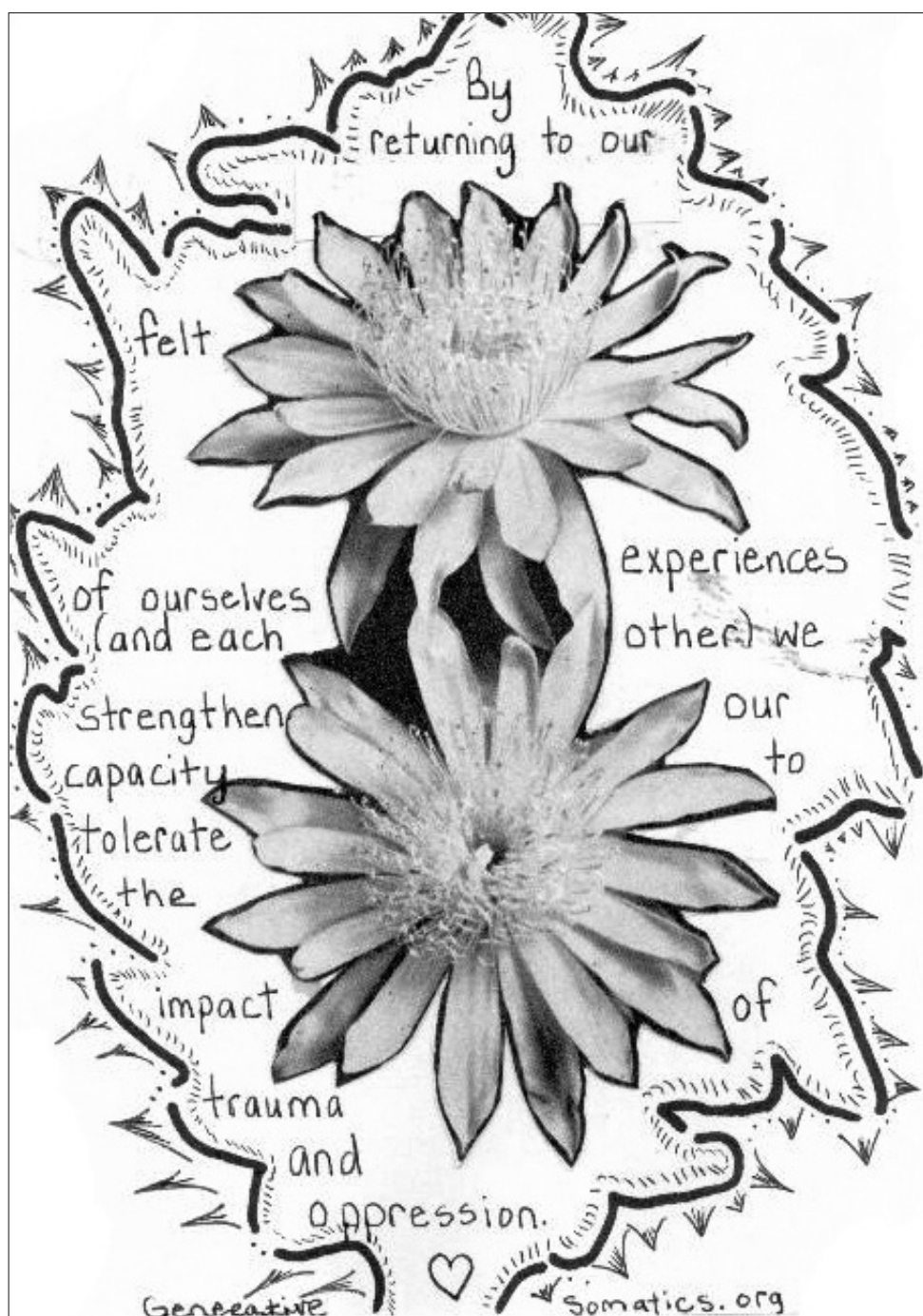
People can definitely use both.

My approach to health is different in a lot of ways. For one, I listen to what people have to say about their bodies and how they feel, as well as what it is that they are wanting. I also look at patterns of imbalance in the body, trying to understand and change the underlying causes rather than just treating symptoms. Herbs can be useful in helping with acute symptoms, but their unique strength is their ability to change the underlying issues that lead to health problems in the first place. The way herbs do this is by strengthening weaknesses in tissues and organs, shifting stress patterns and reorganizing blood and fluid movement in the body. Doctors don't have any therapeutics that can address underlying issues in most cases, which I do think plays a part in their reductionist, symptom-oriented thinking. They look at what they have solutions to, and most of those solutions are very blunt. Herbalists have way more subtle ways to approach problems.

Herbalism has grown dramatically in popularity and usage in the last few decades. Has this affected cultivation and harvesting methods of the plants? Can you explain how you harvest most of the medicine that you prepare?

I do not think that wild populations of plants are going to be able to sustain the ever increasing loss of habitat that development causes for the growing population of people who need and use these medicines. Massive over-harvesting of popular plants is a big problem (and for some plants, has been since Daniel Boone came to this continent), and habitat loss is even bigger. If you are harvesting plants it is critical to know how the plants you are harvesting reproduce, and how the way you are picking that plant will affect that plant community's ability to thrive into the future. There is a need to start using more plants that were grown organically for medicine, rather than depending on wild populations. If you are buying herbs at the store, it is important to know if the plant you are buying is threatened or at-risk, and if so to only buy that plant if it was organically grown.

The way I harvest each plant depends on what part of the plant I want to use for medicine, and how that particular plant propagates itself (how it makes babies). Does it grow like a weed? Does it take many years before it sets seed? Does it only grow in very specific places or need certain pollinators or soil fungi to grow? These are just a few of the questions I am looking at when I am making decisions about if and how I will harvest each plant I use.



Do you have any suggestions for a person trying to cultivate self-awareness in their body in order to gain a fuller understanding of wellness? How do you see this mind-body connection relating to your model of care?

I think that having some awareness of one's body does help in figuring out how to best care for one's self. There are so many ways to cultivate that awareness and each person may have a different way that works best for them. I hope that the work I do with folks can help to cultivate some self-awareness to give people more tools to care for themselves and to feel more empowered and capable.

As far as tips go, let's see: I remember my teacher Adam Seller in our counseling skills class giving us the homework of paying attention to being in our body for a whole day. I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was something like to notice when we stop being able to [be present in our bodies], when we space out, what it feels like to be different distances from different people. I can't really remember because for me that was impossible at the time. And he said if that wasn't possible, if being in our bodies was too dangerous, then to try with some neutral body part—perhaps a hand or a foot. To try for an hour, or 10 minutes. See what it is like.

Another approach is to think of a place that makes you feel calm. Or a person or animal who makes you feel joyful or bright. Or maybe there is an activity or place in your body where you feel strength and joy. What does it feel like in your body to have your feet on the ground in that place? What sensations do you notice when you think about being around that person or animal? What do you notice when you think about doing something you love? Things like this can be a start. To help us begin to have access to the ways our bodies are able to help us.

Can you talk a little bit about the role that anti-capitalism and harm reduction have in your practice?

I suppose anti-capitalism informs the way I look at everything in the world, or is a result of looking at everything in the world and seeing how much it destroys! Regardless, it's hard to separate out its role in my practice. We've touched on some aspects a little already - how I think about harvesting plants for example. I also run a low-cost clinic and have sliding scale and work/trade options available.

We've touched on some aspects of this already as well, but a harm reduction approach is part of the basis of how I go about doing health care. I work with people where they are at and try to come up with recommendations based on the client's goals.

One of your teachers, Michael Moore, is quoted as saying, "Bioregionalism Über Alles." What does this philosophy mean to you?

I don't know what *über alles* means. I could sing that Dead Kennedys song for you...

In your ideal world, what would access to healing modalities look like?

Everyone would have access to what they needed. There would be nothing to get in the way.

Thanks!

CATY CRABB RUNS THE APPALACHIAN
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Athens, OH

SHAME

BECOMES DEEPLY

*EMBEDDED AS A
PERVASIVE SENSE
OF “BADNESS”*

PERMEATING

EVERY PART OF

THEIR LIVES

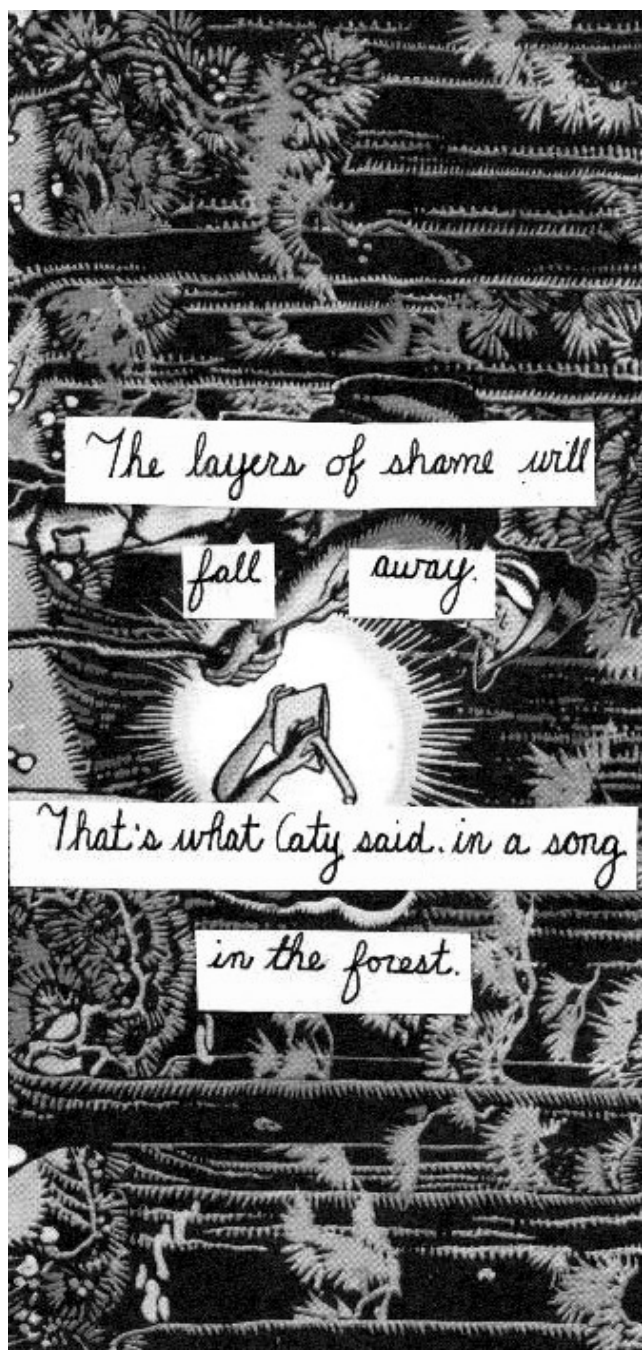
"IN ADDITION, SINCE THE PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGICAL PATTERNS OF TRAUMA AND SHAME ARE SIMILAR, THERE IS AN INTRINSIC ASSOCIATION OF SHAME AND TRAUMA. THIS INCLUDES THE COLLAPSE OF SHOULDERS, SLOWING OF HEART RATE, AVERSION OF EYES, NAUSEA, ETC."



PETER A. LEVINE

IN AN UNSPOKEN VOICE: HOW THE BODY

RELEASES TRAUMA AND RESTORES GOODNESS



The layers of shame will

fall

away.

That's what Caty said, in a song

in the forest.

Dear Friend,

Before I was sexually assaulted, I didn't know what it felt like to feel; didn't know what it felt like to fight back for my life, for my sanity, for my fucking right to be okay in this broken, anxiety inducing world that we live in. I'm lucky. This isn't always how it happens. Sometimes we get stuck in trauma, frozen in a loop pattern of immobility, we forget how to live, how to love, how to breathe.

My body remembered.

It took time. And hard work. And help.

I lost friends. I gained new ones. Met people who knew healthier ways of relating to the healthier self I had become.

An integral component of my healing process has been finding a counselor. In *Sisters of the Yam*, bell hooks talks about the stigma around mental health in the Black community. We experience violence on the daily—in the form of psychological white supremacy, in the trauma of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse.

I sought out free counseling services through Mount Carmel's Crime and Trauma Assistance Program. To learn more, contact them at (614) 234-5900 or ctap@mchs.com.

My counselor helped me find the person I'd lost.

Take Care of Your Self.

With love,
Rachel Lee

STRONG HEART

I've struggled with an eating disorder the majority of my life. I remember when I was in first grade, telling my friends I wanted to go on a diet. I didn't really want to, but I thought it sounded cool. My mom was always on a diet, so it was something that was often talked about. I was an indoor kid, more interested in watching movies, reading, arts and crafts. There I was sitting on the couch, eating processed, hydrogenated, high fructose corn-syrup-laden junk while being fed media messages of how to slim down. My mom warned me incessantly about how fat I was going to get. There were never conversations about healthier alternatives, or ways that my body could help me feel good, not just physically, but emotionally and psychologically. We would go on diets together, cutting up our plain hot dog weiners and splitting a grapefruit, nibbling iceberg lettuce for dinner. Bonding over our shared hatred of ourselves.

After Mom divorced Dad, she was poised to create a fine physique. Proof to the outside world of her newly discovered self, sanctified in the conclusion of matrimonial bliss. Ironically, I started packing on the pounds. I'd tag along with her to gym excursions, usually getting a protein shake, loaded with calories, sugar, way too much protein for my eight year old body and probably about as healthy as a Mickey D's milkshake.

I started feeling intense shame about my body. I was developing stretch marks, all over. It felt like some terrible punishment. Like, you can be fat, but when you have stretch marks, somehow the whole world knows. Each vein-like rupture on my skin shouting the hideousness of my soul, grotesque and malformed. Around the same time, I started developing keloid scars, a hereditary condition where my skin would "over heal" and produce excess collagen after getting a pimple, stitches, or an open wound. I felt guilt-ridden, like a loathsome monster was crawling over me, exposing secrets I tried desperately to hide behind baggy clothes and extra layers. I withdrew inside my head, isolating myself from the world; I began to associate the outdoors with skinny fit people who didn't worry about stretch marks or unsightly scars, ate whatever they wanted, wore bathing suits and were happy.

Initially, I would eat to experience happy feelings I associated with better times, comfort foods that my dad used to make when family life seemed less nightmarish. Before my parents divorced, before my mom quit me for her new family and abusive husband, before all the white kids at school asked me about the rap stars I was supposed to know. I felt

like the outsider in my mom's new family, increasingly developing more shame around my feelings, body and eating habits. I would hurriedly grab from the fridge, run downstairs to the basement, eat alone. Or wait until everyone had gone to bed and silently rifle through the contents of the kitchen for something to fill the emptiness inside my heart.

I started using food to self-medicate, disassociate, numb myself. I remember going through binge cycles. Eating, watching TV, feeling the lining of my stomach fill to full capacity. Eating more, feeling the lining stretch to its limits. The pain of this feeling bringing me back into my body, just for a moment. When it would dissipate, I'd eat more to feel the burning, the stretching, the feeling of feeling something, even if it was pain. I savored it. Sometimes eating just because I enjoyed the sensation of a texture in my mouth. At some point, I forgot what it felt like to be hungry, allowing my emotions to decide when I was going to eat instead of my body.

The worst of these patterns occurred when I was in high school. I started using cutting and self-mutilation to bring myself into my body, as coping mechanisms to handle disassociation. It felt like an echoing static blaring in my ears, numbing out my whole body, from inside out. When I cut, the feeling of the razor breaking through flesh reminded my brain that I could feel, that I was still alive. It allowed me to break through the fog that pounded in my head, a disconnected purgatory of self-loathing and despair. My parents ignored it for a while, denial being their primary pattern of dealing with the destructive behavior of their depressed teenager.

Sometimes they asked about the little markings on my thighs and arms, but the conversations never went further than that. I was overcome with feelings that I didn't have time to feel, or rather, that felt inappropriate to feel, let alone share. My step-dad would say my feelings were excuses for attention, my cutting was "throwing a pity party." Because my cries for help were met with ridicule by the people that were supposed to love me most, I learned to distrust my feelings. Losing sense of what felt good or bad, and everything in between. I didn't allow myself to feel, it seemed a waste of time, passive imaginings of a girl that didn't matter to her family, herself, the world. Desperate for a feeling of belonging amidst the new family my Mom created, I felt like a disgusting, fat slob. Not worth enough to merit protection from the assaulting terror of Step-Dad's abuse. I was screaming inside, at the top of my lungs, for help, for love. I was a walking zombie, insulating my decaying insides with layers of fat.

Sometimes I would use marijuana to increase the disassociation,

then use food or cutting to bring myself back into reality. I didn't have an emotional barometer so I created artificial markers for feeling. On one end were things that would numb me out when the weight of world felt like too much to handle: marijuana, TV, food, even music sometimes. On the other end was self-mutilation and food. These extremes contrasting each other as sides on my emotional scale. I used these physical sensations to remind my emotional self how to feel, because it had forgotten how to on its own. It wasn't until later that I understood there was a continuum of emotional feeling beyond my limited binary understanding.

In recent years I've begun to delve into the trauma symptoms that I'd been carrying around so long, without recognition, like disassociation and anxiety. Often times I didn't realize how triggering it was being around my family. It wasn't until I had a better understanding of what was happening in my body that I was able to consciously register what was happening and take action to remove myself from that situation. In counseling, I've learned ways to lessen the physical sensations associated with those triggers.

Writing has been fundamental in my process of healing around disordered eating, self-hate, abuse, and depression. I didn't know the power words carry: the release of trauma, pain, and toxic muck that accumulates within us, released through writing. In college I started digesting texts by fearless women of color like Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherrie Moraga. These women spoke of language as a means of self-liberation, healing, and transformation. They talked about words like weapons, fire bombs exploding shackles we create for ourselves, informed by society's matrix of intersecting oppressions. Their words opened up my heart and filled it with courage I never knew I had. In the essay, "The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action," Audre Lorde writes, "What are the words you do not have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you sicken and die of them, still, in silence?" This message sunk deep into my bones. Writing became an act of survival, resurrecting the voice that had died, buried beneath years of pain.

But that was only one piece of the puzzle. For a long time I carried feminism around as a blazing emblem of my power, as if these words carried my soul to divine ascension. In doing so, I lost sight of the fact that it was my body that was doing half, if not more, of the slow, arduous task of healing. Ironically, that idea is a product of my patriarchal socialization, that hadn't left my psyche. In this society, we legitimize matters of the mind over matters of the body. We prize the logic of experts,

science, and facts, forgetting that for centuries wise women have known of the body's ability to heal itself. Although I needed words to recognize systems of oppression and abuse, in the end it was my body that remembered what it felt like to be free of these things.

After graduating college, I was emotionally burnt out from school, organizing, ignoring unprocessed trauma that I had buried since childhood. I fell into self-destructive habits. I was depressed and full of bitterness and apathy. A close friend suggested we start practicing yoga. We would drink pots of coffee, get hopped up on caffeine and power through hour long Ashtanga sessions. I felt more in my body than I had my entire life. It was as if the boundaries of my physical self were merging back into my spirit, my being, me.

I started traveling a few months after, working on farms through WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities in Organic Farming), venturing down miles of highway, scaling treetops, exploring mountainous terrain with groups like the Blue Mountain Biodiversity Project. It was the first time I enjoyed being outside for more than a few hours at a time. All of these things cemented my soul into my body. I started reveling in my new found strength, yearning for more. I wanted to carry the fullest barrel of compost, climb the tallest tree, hike for hours and hours. It became this amazing challenge with myself that I had never experienced before. The joy of muscles tiring after setting a goal for myself, reaching it, being exhausted and sweaty, but smiling from ear to ear. The adrenaline was grace flowing through my veins.

At the end of the summer, I ended up on a farm in the middle of a forest in northern Idaho. I had many hours to myself, spent in contemplation and solitude. I worked with women, all over the age of fifty, living off the land, celebrating the seasons, reading the moon with their hearts. I was surrounded by a healing effervescence that I had never felt. Each morning, seeing the fog move through willow boughs, bouncing off sunshine, I was carried away to a peace that lifted up my soul. Feeling my tingling fingertips in frozen soil, I felt humbled to sow seeds that would nourish mouths next harvest. Hearing the coyotes howling in the middle of the night, curled up in my always-freezing-cold camper, the fireplace crackling, I felt happier than I ever had.

While there, I started writing down the harmful relationship that I had with food, the ways I used food to self-medicate, the bingeing and purging cycles, the categories of good/bad foods that were formed by misinformation about nutrition, the emotional motivations I had for eating, the feelings I experienced while in the throes of an out-of-control epi-

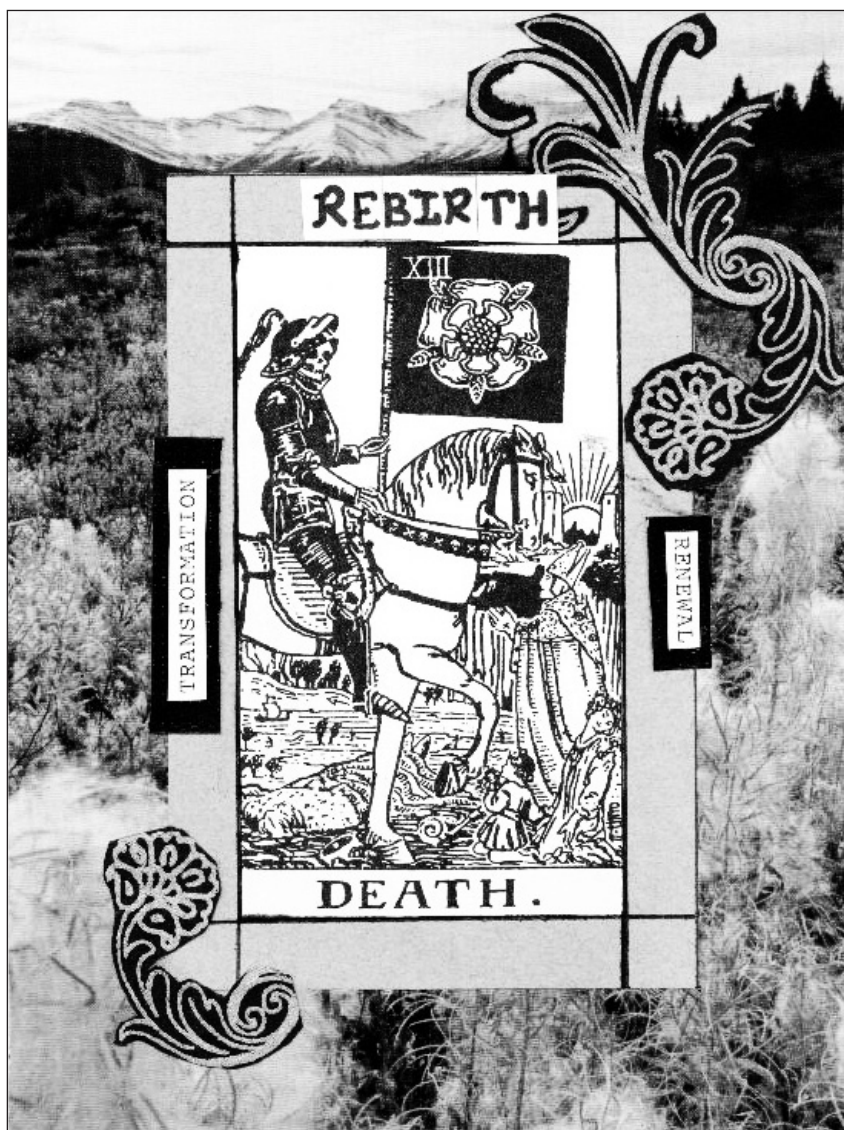
sode. I had never done this before. The process was an unfolding of many years full of mismanaged coping mechanisms. It allowed me to recognize those things and in the process, find healthier ways of dealing with disassociation and depression. My body and spirit were becoming healthier, together. Years of toxic sludge were leaving my body, replaced by bountiful harvests of organic produce, filled with a sort of loving nourishment that I'd never tasted.

That same summer, I went skinny-dipping for the first time in my entire life in one of the most beautiful forests in the country, Mt. Hood, Oregon. I was attending TWAC (Trans and Women's Action Camp), a camp for lady identified, gender-queer and trans folks focusing on tree climbing, environmental organizing, and various other badass skills.

Entering that forest, I was able to sense its personality in the structure of the ferns, the sparkling of the soil, the smell of lichen and moss. One day, inbetween workshops and cob oven building, I wandered off to a cliff side where I found Arielle, a fabulously self-assured woman of color that shared with me tales of shoplifting REIs and hitching across the country. We sat sharing our experiences as Brown women at a predominantly white space, our issues with self-esteem, our journeys of healing to reclaim our blossoming souls. She was basking in the water, naked from head to toe. I was so jealous. "I wish I could do that," I told her. "You can!" she exclaimed. I told her how scared I was to take off my clothes around people, because of my fat, scars, and stretch marks. She retorted, "If I can do it, you can do it too." For some reason, I believed her.

Slowly, very slowly, I peeled off the layers. It felt scary and empowering. I felt myself flinching every time I sensed someone looking my direction. Once in, she told me that she had just jumped off a huge rock formation in the middle of the swimming hole. She asked if I wanted to. I'd never done it before, but what the hell, I was already naked, I might as well jump off a huge-ass rock while I was at it. We scaled the formation, helping each other up the slippery bits. Reaching the top, she asked me if I wanted to make a wish before jumping in. I tried desperately to think of the perfect wish, one that could meet the full significance of the moment.

And suddenly... it came! I wished to smash the walls of my captivity, be free, once and for all from all those years of self-hatred and shame. I pressed my eyes closed, wishing as hard as I could to fill every fiber of my body with faith in that wish. Taking a few running steps, I took in the largest breath I could and jumped into the sparkling emerald waters.



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